



COLLABORATIONS



Sept./Oct. 1999

The Newsletter for California's Community-Focused Court Planning and Court Community Outreach Initiatives

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"A new era of collaboration between county courts, the Judicial Council, and California's communities will lead to a renewal of public trust and confidence in the administration of justice and the primacy of the rule of law in California."
—Chief Justice Ronald M. George

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County Spotlight The Strategic Planning Process — Nevada, Siskiyou, and Tulare Superior Courts — Different but Similar Approaches

The Superior Court of Nevada County shares the distinction of being among the first courts in the state to begin community-focused court planning. The court's strategic planning team, led by **Judge Ersel L. Edwards**, assisted by **Paula Carli**, Court Executive Officer, and composed of a cross-section of court stakeholders, began meeting even before the statewide kick-off conference of May 1998.

Vision and mission statements were the team's first tasks, and once completed, the work of scheduling focus group meetings to identify emerging trends and stakeholder expectations was undertaken. Four initial focus groups — business and professionals, law enforcement and court-related offices, educators and youth, and special interests and non-profit groups — were planned. Over sixty individuals responded and were organized into the four groups, which because of the county's geographic divisions, were conducted in eastern and western county sessions.

Paula Carli reports that western county sessions have

already yielded opportunities for local court improvements (eastern sessions are ongoing). In order to ensure that a full spectrum of court users have the opportunity to provide planning input, the team intends to conduct a one-page public survey. The survey will be run in two local newspapers and made available at court and county public sites.

The team has been encouraged by their initial findings and by the level of community interest and commitment to ongoing court improvement efforts. ☐

Mission Statement, Superior Court of California, Nevada County:

To be an effective and trusted center for the administration of justice, maintaining community respect through the scope and quality of services, and commitment to continuous improvement.

The strategic planning team of the Superior Court of Siskiyou County, appointed by **Presiding Judge Robert F. Kaster**, and led by **William E. Jaynes**, Court Executive Officer, made obtaining comments and opinions from a variety of court stakeholders a top priority in its planning process. Over a six-month period the committee met with a variety of individuals and agencies that the court serves. Several well-attended public forums provided information for the planning process, which the team used in drafting the court's vision and mission statements.

The data collected also proved useful in helping the team to

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identify strategic issues, i.e., trends, events, and policy choices, that affect the court's ability to meet service demands encompassed by its vision and mission statements.

The strategic draft plan submitted by the Siskiyou Superior Court follows a structural format that identifies each *strategic issue*, sets a *general strategy* for addressing it, cites specific *goals* and *objectives* for pursuing the general strategy, and finally, sets specific *tasks* for addressing each goal.

For example, the first *strategic issue* in Siskiyou's draft plan focuses on improving court infrastructures (facilities, communication, and staffing) in order to meet stakeholder needs over the next decade. The *general strategy* for addressing this issue is increased collaboration with county government to explore a unified government center. One of the specific *goals* set forth as a means of pursuing the general strategy, and thus addressing the previously cited strategic issue, is securing safe, conveniently located, spacious court facilities that include jury rooms, holding rooms, filing and storage areas, conference rooms, a library, and parking.

Finally, the plan lists several specific tasks to accomplish the goal, such as: (1) assign a court staff person to document current facilities; (2) meet with judges and court staff to review this documentation and assess the adequacy of facilities; (3) hold public meetings to obtain stakeholder review of strengths and limitations in current facilities; (4) appoint court/community team to develop a facilities plan addressing current and future needs; (5) hold additional public meetings to discuss facility needs and recommended facility

plans; (6) appoint court/community team to explore viable facilities and to consider expansion of current facilities; (7) assign court staff to assess probable areas of opposition to the facilities plan; (8) organize court/community team to examine funding sources; (9) hold town meetings to sell the plan; and (10) use the strategic plan as a tool for selling budget requests to the Judicial Council and Legislature. ▢

Mission Statement, Superior Court of California, Siskiyou County:

The mission of the Siskiyou County Superior Court is to provide a neutral forum for timely resolution of disputes according to law.



The Superior Court of Tulare County's recently submitted draft plan begins with an impressive comprehensive executive summary and county overview. Clearly, the court's planning team, appointed by **Presiding Judge Patrick J. O'Hara** and led by **Judge William Silveira, Jr.**, has taken the business of assessing community needs seriously, as this summary of county history and demography sets the stage for the rest of the court's strategic plan. Efforts to conduct public surveys on needed court improvements and services are ongoing and the results will be incorporated into the team's final draft plan.

The current draft sets forth a "Top Five" list of *long-range issues* for implementation and analysis. The issue list includes: improving access to services in outlying areas and expansion of ADR; improving court security; improving customer service and training of court employees; improving

facilities maintenance; and improving jury accommodations. The draft plan follows the strategic plan template recommended by the Community-Focused Court Planning Implementation Committee by organizing the plan into *long-range issues*, with *goals* and *strategies*, and *desirable outcomes* for each issue.

For example, the plan's first *long-range issue*, Improving Access to Services in outlying areas, sets forth one *goal* — ensure equal court access — five *strategies* for achieving that goal, and twelve *desirable outcomes*. Strategies include: (1) maximizing services in all courts; (2) making it easier for the public to resolve disputes in local areas; (3) making better use of assets by balancing caseloads; (4) creating needed specialty courts; and (5) increasing the availability of help and information. A partial list of noted desirable outcomes is: (1) accept civil filings in all courthouses in the county and allow for issuance of temporary orders; (2) establish kiosks in outlying areas for filing court paperwork, forms and information distribution, and fee payment; (3) resolve disputes in local areas (small claims, traffic, fines, and limited jurisdiction cases); (4) realign judicial caseload to equalize workloads.

Court Executive Officer **LaRayne Cleek** reports that the planning team's next steps will be to identify, prioritize, and schedule plan objectives, and to secure cost estimates and resource requirements. ▢

Mission Statement, Superior court of California, Tulare County

To provide equal and timely access to justice, the impartial application of law, and the promotion of community interventions toward the peaceful and fair resolution of disputes.

Implementation Committee Members Collaborate With TCBC to Link Budget With Strategic Planning

As the state considers the link between strategic planning and the budget process, members of the Community-Focused Court Planning Implementation Committee have begun working with the Trial Court Budget Commission (TCBC) and its working groups to explore possible strategies. In a presentation made on July 28, 1999, **Judge Judith McConnell**, Superior Court of California, San Diego County and Implementation Committee co-chair, outlined the Implementation Committee's recommendations on budget and planning to the TCBC. Judge McConnell pointed out that institutionalizing court strategic planning as part of the budget process yields advantages to state courts in their funding negotiations with the legislature since community involvement builds court advocates. Furthermore, strategic plans provide a means of substantiating funding requests. Other members of the Implementation Committee have also collaborated with the TCBC. **Hon. Douglas P. Miller**, Superior Court of California, Riverside County, is the committee's liaison to the TCBC's Budget Development Working Group, whose charge is to develop a budget development process that can be fairly and evenly applied to the state's trial court systems in fiscal year 2001– 2002 and beyond. Likewise, Justice **Thomas E. Hollenhorst**, Court of Appeal, Fourth Appellate District, Division Two, is liaison to the TCBC's Allocation Working Group charged with ensuring adoption and use of a consistent allocation methodology. ☐

Superior Court of Alameda County Reports on Community- Focused Court Planning

The Superior Court of California, County of Alameda is actively developing the court's strategic plan in collaboration with the many communities it serves. Immediately after the statewide planning conference of May 1998, **Presiding Judge Philip V. Sarkisian** appointed an initial community-focused planning group. In October 1998 the court's Executive Committee formally approved a Community-Focused Court Planning Committee (CFCPC) comprised of judicial officers, court employees, members of the Bar, and public members.

The CFCPC, under the energetic direction of its chair, **Judge Gordon S. Baranco**, views the Community-Focused Court Planning process as an opportunity to find new ways of communicating with and providing better service to the public.

The CFCPC initially focused on soliciting public comments about how the court could enhance services. Next, the CFCPC adopted an outreach plan featuring:

- Countywide distribution of more than 1,500 invitations to attend five community meetings. (Open dialogue at the meetings produced hundreds of thoughtful comments and suggestions. A majority of the court's judges, commissioners, and court staff were on hand to listen to the people attending the community meetings.)
- Expansion of the court's Web site to include an e-mail address for public comments and concerns.
- A dedicated 24-hour phone message number for community comments or

suggestions.

- Distribution of a countywide survey to more than 1,000 respondents soliciting comments on how the court can improve its service.

The CFCPC's next step was to adopt a process to build on the information gathered and to develop a Draft Community-Focused Strategic Plan. That process includes:

- Establishment of focus groups in the areas of education, community, jury, modernization, youth and specialized court services. (Groups were based upon reoccurring themes expressed in public meetings, e-mail, and voice-mail messages.)
- Focus groups review and discuss the information and data collected; focus groups begin development of the court's Draft Community-Focused Court Strategic Plan.
- Draft Community-Focused Court Strategic Plan distributed to the entire court for comment.
- Community meetings scheduled to present the draft strategic plan and to solicit public comments.
- Court reviews and approves the plan to be forwarded to the Judicial Council in December 1999.
- Court continues strategic plan implementation activities in 2000.

Questions concerning the Community-Focused Court Planning process may be directed to **Judge Gordon S. Baranco** at 510.272.6124 or **Tom Duncan**, Bureau Chief, at 510.272.5002. (This article submitted by Superior Court of California, Alameda County.) ☐

Contributions for Collaborations?

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Strategic Planning Tips Forwarded to County Planning Teams

In an effort to provide continuing assistance to county court strategic planning teams, the Implementation Committee recently forwarded plan feedback and revision suggestions to those courts which submitted draft plans and updates. In addition, a planning tips packet, "Sample Plan Formats and Elements to Consider," was mailed to all team leaders, presiding judges, and court executive officers in late August. This packet is the result of the committee's review of draft plans and identifies key elements that may yield more useful and comprehensive court plans.

Chief among these elements is the use of *plan formats or templates*. The packet includes

a strategic plan template, the use of which provides a clear connection between plan components as well as assisting those charged with review of plans on a statewide level. Other key elements include: *clear communication* (the use of language accessible to a non-court audience); *process information* (trends identification and consensus-building processes); *measurable goals*; *specific strategies, tasks, and timelines*; a *full range of court operations* (planning for all court operations, including technology and personnel); *solutions* (not just a list of challenges); a "*bottom-up*" *planning process* (consensus among community members, court staff, and judges); *long-range issues* (not just current or short range needs); and *operational and action plans* (objectives, task plan, and

timeline for implementation of the plan).

Additional copies of the planning tips packet, "Sample Plan Formats and Elements to Consider," can be obtained by contacting Jack Urquhart (415.865.7654; jack.urquhart@jud.ca.gov).

1998 Ground-Breaking Conference Materials Re-Issued

A reprint of the conference binder from the May 1998 first-of-its-kind statewide conference, *Courts and Their Communities, Local Planning and the Renewal of Public Trust and Confidence*, is available for distribution to the court community. To obtain a copy, contact Jack Urquhart (415.865.7654; jack.urquhart@jud.ca.gov).



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Dates to Remember:

Fall 1999: First Draft Strategic Plan *Extension*, September 30, 1999
Winter 1999: December 15, 1999: Final Draft Plan Due at AOC.